

METHOD AND DEVICE FOR SEPARATING CONSTITUENTS OF A LIQUID
FEED BY LIQUID-LIQUID CENTRIFUGAL CHROMATOGRAPHY

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

The present invention relates to a method for separating constituents of a liquid feed
5 by liquid-liquid centrifugal chromatography and to a device for implementing it.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

A known technique for separating constituents of a mixture, referred to as simulated
moving bed (SMB) or simulated countercurrent (SCC) technique, consists in passing
the mixture into a set of columns arranged in series and comprising each beds filled
10 with an adsorbent. A complex assembly of pumps, lines and valves makes it possible to
establish through the beds a fluid circulation allowing injection of a feed from which at
least one constituent is to be separated and of an eluent containing chiefly the desorbent,
or withdrawal of an extract containing chiefly the preferably adsorbed constituent or of
a raffinate mainly consisting of the least preferably adsorbed elements. Such a system is
15 for example described in patent FR-2,762,793.

It is not possible in a SCC to circulate the solid phase. It is simulated by means of a
complex set of valves and pumps controlled according to complicated algorithms.
Periodic replacement of the solid phases in the columns is extremely costly and requires
relatively long production stops. This type of system is difficult to manage because of
20 the complexity thereof. Its maintenance is also heavy.

Another known technique for separating constituents A and B in solution in a liquid mixture consists in injecting it into a "chromatographic column" subjected to a centrifugal force, which is designed to allow one of the liquid phases to be percolated through the other liquid phase and vice versa (chromatography referred to as CCC or
5 CPC).

In practice, as shown notably in patents FR-2,791,578, US-4,551,251, US-4,877,523 or US-4,857,187, this type of system comprises one or more piles of disks D driven in rotation (see Fig.4). Each one comprises in the thickness thereof and over its entire periphery a succession of cells CE laid out in a radial or oblique direction and
10 arranged in series by a set of circuits of fine winding lines L at the ends of each cell. The circuits of all the disks communicate with one another. The cells and their communication circuits are filled with a stationary liquid phase kept in place by the centrifugal force and another mobile liquid phase that percolates through the stationary phase.

15

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The method according to the invention allows separation of the constituents of a feed in liquid solution of at least two constituents of different partition coefficients such that they are carried along at unequal velocities respectively by a light solvent and by a heavier solvent, in a device comprising at least one liquid-liquid centrifugal
20 chromatographic column consisting of the interconnection in series of at least one chain of separation cells.

The method is essentially characterized in that it comprises:

- injecting the feed at an intermediate point of the chain of cells, and
- carrying out alternating cycles of two stages, with a first stage during a first time interval wherein a lighter solvent is injected through a first end of the device and a first constituent is collected at a second end of the device, and a second stage during a second time interval wherein a heavier solvent is injected through the second end of the device and a second constituent is collected at the first end.

Preferably, the respective durations of the first and second stages and/or the rates of injection of the lighter and of the heavier solvent are adjusted according to the constituents of the mixture so as to obtain optimum separation.

According to an embodiment, several cascade separations are performed to isolate from one another the various constituents of a mixture made up of more than two constituents.

This embodiment applies for example to the separation of two optical isomers with injection into a first device of a feed comprising the optical isomers and a chiral selector to obtain a first isomer on the one hand and a mixture of a second isomer and of chiral selector on the other hand, then injection of this mixture from the first device into a second device suited to separate the second isomer and the chiral selector.

The device according to the invention allows separation of the constituents of a feed in liquid solution of at least two constituents having different partition coefficients such that they are carried along at unequal velocities respectively by a lighter solvent and a heavier solvent. It comprises at least one liquid-liquid centrifugal chromatographic

column consisting of the interconnection in series of at least one chain of separation cells. Each column is associated with a first pump for injecting the feed at an intermediate point of the chain of cells, a first valve connecting a first end of the column to a first vessel for collecting a first constituent (FA) or to a second pump for injecting a first solvent (L), a second valve (V2) connecting a second end of the column to a second vessel for collecting a second constituent (FB) or to a third pump (P3) for injecting a second solvent (1), alternating valves (V1, V2) switching means so as to switch alternately from a first stage with injection of the first solvent (L) and reception of the separated second constituent (FB) to a second stage with injection of the second solvent (1) and reception of the separated first constituent (FA), and means for controlling the pump flow rate.

According to an embodiment, the device comprises for example two cascade separation columns for separating the constituents of a mixture comprising at least three different constituents.

The device is also suited for continuous as well as discontinuous feed injection.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE FIGURES

Other features and advantages of the method and of the device according to the invention will be clear from reading the description hereafter of an embodiment given by way of non limitative example, with reference to the accompanying figures wherein:

- Figure 1 diagrammatically shows, in a first cyclic operating stage, a separation unit with a separation column and associated circulation means where the mixture to be separated is injected at an intermediate point in accordance with the method of the invention,

- Figure 2 diagrammatically shows the same unit in a second cyclic operating stage,
- Figure 3 illustrates, by way of example, the progressive separation as a function of time of the elements of a mixture injected at a given time into a 200-cell separation unit, under the action of the cyclic stages diagrammatically shown in Figures 1, 2,
- 5 - Figure 4 shows an example of a column (or separation column fraction) in form of a disk subjected to centrifugation and comprising, over the entire periphery thereof, radial cells interconnected in series through which the constituents to be separated and the solvents circulate,
- Figure 5 shows an example of layout of two multi-disk separation sets subjected to
10 centrifugation and interconnected in series, with injection of the mixture in the intermediate circuit connecting them, and
- Figure 6 diagrammatically shows the cascade connection of separation sets allowing in some cases separation of a mixture comprising more than two constituents.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

15 The system essentially comprises (Figs.1, 2) at least one liquid-liquid centrifugal chromatographic column (Col) subjected to centrifugation designed to separate a mixture (A, B) into its two constituents A and B. At an intermediate point of the column, a pump P1 injects liquid mixture (A, B) to be separated continuously or discontinuously.

20 At a first end E1, the column is connected via a first valve V1 either to a first vessel FA for collecting first constituent A or to an inlet communicating through an injection pump P2 with a vessel containing a heavy solvent L. At its opposite end E2, the column

is connected via a second valve V2 either to an outlet communicating with another vessel FB for collecting constituent B or to an inlet communicating through an injection pump P2 with a vessel containing a light solvent l.

In the embodiment illustrated in Figs.1, 2, constituents A and B are considered to have partition coefficients such that B is carried along more rapidly than A by heavy solvent L and A is carried along more rapidly than B by light solvent l.

In the first stage (Fig.1) of duration t_1 , pump P2 pumps during some time heavy solvent L which is then in a “mobile phase” situation, whereas light solvent l is in the device in a stationary phase situation.

In the second stage (Fig.2) of duration t_2 , pump P3 pumps during some time light solvent l which is then in a “mobile phase” situation, whereas heavy solvent L is in the device in a stationary phase situation.

After continuous injection of sample (A, B) by means of pump P1 and periodic switching of valves V1 and V2, thus alternately switching from the connection mode of Figure 1 to that of Figure 2, A ends up in vessel FA and B in vessel FB.

This separation phenomenon is illustrated in Figure 3 where a small amount of a mixture A, B was injected, at a given time and during a limited time interval, in the middle of a column with 200 interconnected cells for example. The separation phenomenon is observed with constituent A (grey) moving towards one end of the column and the other constituent B (black) moving towards the opposite end. It can be clearly seen in Fig.3 that A and B are shuttled between the cells upon each cycle, which

amounts to artificially lengthening the circulation distance. Everything goes on as though the number of cells had been increased.

Durations t_1 and t_2 and the injected solvent flow rates can be varied to obtain fast divergence of the constituents towards the opposite ends of the column (as shown in Fig.3).

Of course, if mixture A, B is injected continuously, constituents A and B are also collected continuously.

In the device according to the invention, filling of the two liquid phases requires about ten minutes and, as long as the production type is not changed, there is no need to stop it.

The liquid phases are considerably less expensive than the solid phases used in SMB type separation systems. For the same production volume, the mobile phase consumption is reduced by a factor of the order of 10 with the device described.

In the example of Figure 5, the system comprises two parallel drums T1, T2 consisting each of a pile of disks as shown in Figure 4 and driven in rotation. These two drums are connected in series. They can be rotated in the same direction or, as shown here, in opposite directions if the series interconnection circuits can be simplified thereby. The mixture is injected through pump P1 at an intermediate point on the line connecting them. Pump P2 is connected to the inlet of drum T1 in ascending mode (lighter mobile phase) and pump P3 is connected to the inlet of drum T2 in descending mode (heavier mobile phase).

It is clear that the intermediate point of injection of the mixture into the column can be selected wherever it is considered to be best, considering the effective partition coefficients of the constituents of the mixture.

The separation system with several units of Figure 6 allows to obtain cascade
5 separations. If the initial mixture comprises three constituents A, B, C such that the first unit is suited to separate A on the one hand and B, C on the other hand, it is possible, after the first separation, to inject the remaining mixture B, C into a second separation unit and to obtain separation of constituents B and C.

It is advantageous for example in the case where two optical isomers are to be
10 separated. A chiral selector is therefore usually added thereto. As known to the man skilled in the art, this allows to separately obtain, at the respective outlets of the first unit, a first isomer and the second isomer mixed with the chiral selector. If the remaining mixture of second isomer and chiral selector is injected into the second separation unit, the chiral selector can then be entirely recovered, which is very
15 advantageous considering its high cost.

The two tables hereafter sum up the advantages of the method according to the invention (referred to as CPCPC), the first one in relation to conventional liquid-liquid centrifugal chromatography methods, and the second in relation to SMB type separation systems.

	Conventional CPC (and CCC)	CPCPC
Injection	Finite volume of A, B injected at one end of the "chromatographic column"	Continuous injection of A, B at a point located between the ends of the "chromatographic column"
Elution	Ascending mode or descending mode, or dual mode, i.e. a single cycle of the two modes	Alternating elution in the two modes, with a frequency Φ defined by the operator
Fractions collected	Fractions collected at the end of the "chromatographic column" opposite the injection end, or in dual mode successively at each end, corresponding to the single cycle of modes selected	Fractions collected at the two ends of the "chromatographic column", alternately with a frequency Φ
Two-phase systems	Identical for both techniques	
Filling of the "chromatographic column"	Generally stationary phase first, then equilibrium with the mobile phase before or after injection	Simultaneous filling with the two phases according to a ratio defined by the operator

	SMB	CPCPC
Injection	Finite volume of A, B injected at one end of the "chromatographic column"	Continuous injection of A, B at a point located between the ends of the "chromatographic column"
Elution	Ascending mode or descending mode, or dual mode, i.e. a single cycle of the two modes	Alternating elution in the two modes, with a frequency Φ defined by the operator
Fractions collected	Fractions collected at the end of the "chromatographic column" opposite the injection end, or in dual mode successively at each end, corresponding to the single cycle of modes selected	Fractions collected at the two ends of the "chromatographic column", alternately with a frequency Φ
Two-phase systems	Identical for both techniques	
Filling of the "chromatographic column"	Generally stationary phase first, then equilibrium with the mobile phase before or after injection	Simultaneous filling with the two phases according to a ratio defined by the operator

It can be noted that the separation system according to the invention substantially consumes 10 times less solvent than the SMB system.

It can also be noted that the feed can be injected continuously as well as
5 discontinuously at an intermediate point of the column.